

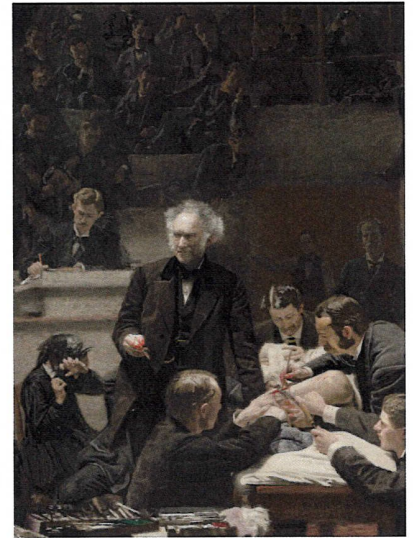
Stewart Goldman  
Cross Currents



## The Goldman Clinic

### The Fine Art of Depiction

In 1875, Philadelphia native Thomas Eakins painted Philadelphia's most famous painting, *The Gross Clinic*, to commemorate the US Centennial. In 2006, 3600 donors from 50 states pooled their funds to buy it from the Jefferson Medical College, so that it could remain on view either at the Philadelphia Museum of Art or the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (its joint owners). Although this painting is named for a surgeon, not the gory scene, at least one onlooker (apparently the patient's mother) is visibly distraught by the sight. Dr. Samuel David Gross is depicted instructing his students on the fine art of surgery. Art historians have long compared Eakins' masterpiece to Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp* (1632), which features a behatted surgeon dissecting a cadaver's left arm in front of seven besuited spectators, all dressed in that era's finery, replete with pleated collars and jaunty goatees. Both tableaux immerse passersby within the scene, ensuring us a ticket to the operating theater. Not only did Stewart Goldman (b. 1936) grow up in Philadelphia, but he attended art school within walking distance of these three venerable institutions (two museums and a hospital).



Portrait of Dr. Samuel D. Gross  
(*The Gross Clinic*), 1875

When it comes to perspectives, art historians commonly discuss the bird's-eye view, worm's eye view, street view, and eye-level, or horizontal view. Each view provokes what philosophers call "seeing-in," as opposed to "seeing that" (ordinary sight) or "seeing as" (metaphorical seeing). Our capacity to "see-in" necessitates our grasping depiction, such that we experience scenes rendered in 2-D as 3-D space. Painters of all stripes must master this feat. Both paintings above employ eye-level views to situate viewers in the scene. These days, we ought to consider a fifth view, what I call the "drone view," much like drones swooping through space. That is, a view from the ground mingles with another hovering overhead, while yet another moves horizontally through space to meet another soaring upwards. Lacking the notion of a "drone view," I earlier characterized Goldman's capacity to depict simultaneous perspectives as his "topsy-turvy" approach or his paintings' "twirling perspective" (Spaid 2008: 9).

Consider the way Goldman's treescapes (aka "The White Paintings," since 2008) let us "see-through" what look to be the skeletal remains of denuded branches (not actually the case as I explain later). Since we're not immersed in these scenes, our eyes tend to dart about, much like drones on a mission, as we ask ourselves "What am I looking at?" Sometimes it seems like we're scooting atop the canopy. Each painting in this series originated as a photograph of a natural landscape taken by Goldman. Shot at eye level on location in either the Yucatan (Mexico), New Zealand, or Italy, several incidentally double as flyover views.



Goldman's use of the drone view and seeing-through engenders a "transcendental vision" that captures what's happening behind the scene: under bark, behind walls, or in people's thoughts. Almost every painting in his oeuvre evokes this transcendental vision, characteristic of Judaism's endless questioning "Why?," 19th century naturalists and the Transcendental Painting Group (1938-1945). Dr. Gross taught his students the fine art of surgery, while Dr. Tulp's showed his students the fine art of dissection, both of which reveal details ordinarily disguised by flesh. "The Goldman Clinic" rather demonstrates how the fine art of depiction can be deployed to peel back the cloudy layers obscuring everyday reality.

### Transcendental Visions

An early 19th century movement, Transcendentalists defined truth as an "ultimate reality" not necessarily perceptible to the five senses. Hardly a psychic or hallucinator, Goldman seems to be asking himself, "What's actually going on here that's not immediately perceptible to the senses?" Answering this question requires a transcendentalist mindset, coupled with a superb imagination, otherwise artists are limited to "ordinary perception" (Scruton). 19th century philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson articulated the transcendental mindset: "Thus in our fine arts, not imitation but creation is the aim. In landscapes, the painter should give the suggestion of a fairer creation than we know. The details, the prose of nature he should omit and give us only the spirit and the splendor. ...[T]he same *power* [italics mine] which sees through his eyes is seen in that spectacle; and he will come to value the expression of nature and not nature itself, and so exalt in his copy the features that please him" (Emerson 1981: 246). Confucians call this imperceptible power shaping the cosmos *dao*, while Henri Bergson termed it *élan vital*.

Had Goldman exhibited alongside Ida Applebroog, Sandro Chia, Enzo Cucchi, Francesco Clemente, Eric Fischl, Leon Golub, David Salle, or Mark Tansey, during the heyday of Neo-Expressionism, that era's critics would have gladly "deconstructed" his mysterious paintings *Dancing in the Dark* (1975) and *The Olde Soft Shoe* (1975), this survey's two earliest. Extremely complicated in structure, these paintings depict a living room scene overlaying a porch. We witness the male protagonist, trapped indoors, gazing outwards where frolicking gals (and guys) engage in all sorts of surprising (and voluptuous) activities.

Goldman's Holocaust paintings (*Chambers I-VII* (1981-1982), *Chamber* (1997), and *Bird* (1997)) epitomize the transcendental vision, since they invite us to peer beyond appearances. Years ago, I detailed how each of these pictures, painted entirely from his imagination, casts sunlight as "the actor, who steps out to arouse and direct viewer sentiment" (Spaid 2008: 7). What interests me now is the way these scenes, spliced from real places, request viewers to imagine what already happened and what will happen next. Void of people, such dynamic tableaux, replete with bouncing reflections, shadows (trees, clouds, fumes, flames, smoke, towels, tracks, lamps, rails), and escape options (ladders, windows, doorways, staircases, rails) prompt us to recall the Holocaust's horrific details. Much like *Gross Clinic* and *Anatomy Lesson* viewers, we are implicated in these gory stories.



No doubt, the winged female in *The Tempest* (1986) has superpowers, yet the title suggests she's more of a stormy temptress than an innocent angel. The rare portrait, *Arnold's Dive* (1986) pays tribute to Goldman's brother by posing him doing a daring dive off a cliff into an Italian river surrounded by rocky features. Painted after he lost his brother to cancer, this painting immortalizes all who have the courage to face life-threatening illnesses.

While in residency at the Villa Waldberta in Feldafing, Germany, Goldman started painting forests using a palette adopted from *Variations on Rubens # 11* (1989), which became his signature palette for the next two decades. Unlike his recent "White Paintings," these forests are denser, painted in an allover format akin to his abstract paintings from the early aughties. *Feldafing II* (1997), a grid of 35 tiny 6" x 6" paintings, best exemplifies transcendental vision, since this treescape is literally dissected by the empty wall space surrounding each painting.

## X-Ray Vision

More than mere depiction, the transcendental vision is akin to x-ray vision. Between 1986 and 1993, Goldman "dissected" Rubens' *The Feast of Venus* (1635-1636) from the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, 24 times, engendering the series known as "Variations on Rubens." Rather than literally slicing and splicing paintings à la Lee Krasner, paintings like *Variations on Rubens: #9* (1989) demonstrate how altering a painting's color combinations profoundly modifies its imagery. Again, the net effect feels like Goldman used x-ray vision to penetrate Rubens' painting. Incidentally, this was also the era when conservators started actively using Infrared imaging and UV light to peer beneath paintings' surfaces. *Variations on Rubens: # 4* (1988), #5 (1988), and #12 (1990), all horizontal save the last, are also on view here. Just as Damien Hirst floated animal halves and deskinning heads in formaldehyde so that people could see through skin, Goldman's #4 and #5 capture Rubens' fleshy figures void of skin and drapes, rendering their plumpish figures in lines evocative of figurative drawing stencils.

Since 2013, Goldman and Kristi Nelson have been especially lucky to rent a room in the same house in the Tuscan village of Pienza. His fascination with the olive trees behind the villa led him to photograph, draw with either oil crayons or colored pencils, and eventually paint dozens of paintings inspired by this vista. In depicting what's circulating under the bark, Goldman captures each tree's power, what he calls its "rhythm." What look like denuded trees is actually the xylem (or sap) pulsing up the tree and the phloem (or sap) coursing back to its roots. These paintings harken back to a series of small watercolors painted in and around the Santa Giuliana Valley in 1985. In light of climate change, forest mining, and the current Russia-Ukraine War, the destruction of forests has taken on a greater urgency, as *Ukraine Woods* (2022) spells out.

Despite the trees' pulsing and coursing energy, "The White Paintings" are far cooler than Goldman's earlier bubbling, lava-lamp-like patterns, which he completed at the height of the financial meltdown (2007-8). In retrospect, the imagery in that series (2002-2009) suggests breakaway icebergs, melting glaciers, and lava



flows; all signs of global warming. Fifteen years ago, I benignly described them as exemplary of “changing weather patterns,” yet they clearly signaled global warming’s nefarious side-effects. I wrote, “Prone to employ reds, golds, pinks, oranges, plums, limes, and forest greens, the most recent paintings actually evoke fanning flames, radiation, the birth of stars, explosions, combustion, and infrared satellite maps” (Spaid 2008: 6). Either way, this series is no less transcendental in scope, since they let us see-through Earth’s atmosphere to earthly events ordinarily available only Landsat satellite photographs.

### Dissecting (Art) History

With *Last of the Sabine Women* (1980), we not only have a diptych with two distinct vantage points, but two open doors reveal a person, whose shadow and reflection on a mirror are visible in the adjacent hallway, entering glass double doors, apparently searching for a hideout space. Goldman’s *Diane and Actaeon* (1984) “recasts” Titian’s 1559 painting, in which Actaeon interrupts Diane’s bathing alongside voluptuous nymphs, from the perspective of Diane’s unprecedented anger. The resulting scene’s chaos features outraged nymphs and barking dogs.

Far from being a “spa town,” as the SS advertised the Theresienstadt Ghetto in 1941 in order to lure elderly Jews to retire there, this ersatz “Potemkin Village” was spruced up in 1944 so as to convince Danish Red Cross representatives that its inhabitants lived well. Upon learning that 90% of the 15,000 children died following deportation from this ghetto, Goldman created *Cherubs of Theresienstadt* (1994-1995) to memorialize these children’s senseless deaths and Nazi deceptions. Goldman’s 32 bluish cherubs are either lifted straight from Rubens’ peachy cupids in *The Feast of Venus* or based on baby photos from friends and family members.

With *Tales of Slavery and Deliverance* (1997), Goldman created a print portfolio of 13 etchings to accompany Holocaust survivor Dr. Anna Ornstein’s autobiographical account of her having survived Auschwitz alongside her mother. For this series, he created several new images, but he also adapted imagery from his Holocaust paintings, so he effectively dissected his own art.

For *Pulse* (2007), Goldman effectively revisits Rembrandt’s dissection scene, though the viewer’s attention is drawn to the throbbing pulse at its core. Rembrandt too pursued the pulse, since his *Anatomy Lesson* begins with the radial pulse, rather than the heart, as was the norm back then. With Goldman’s *The Anatomy Lesson* (2007), one imagines a massive hemorrhage spilling bile, blood, gore, and guts all over. No less bloody is *Capri Red Cave* (2012), one of three nearly identical paintings painted from the same photo, though in different colors (also purple and blue). Here, one imagines Earth hemorrhaging.



*The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632)  
Rembrandt



Struck by the spate of mass shootings in the United States, Goldman was contemplating how to address this horror when COVID-19 struck, which added its own twist. Not only were parents losing children to gun violence, but now children were losing their parents to COVID-19 (around 150,000 children lost a parent), which led him to imagine far fewer families sharing in the joy of holiday train sets. To address this misfortune, Goldman installed *Trains* (2021), two train sets crisscrossing a United States map, accompanied by screens broadcasting information regarding Covid and gun violence deaths plus drawings of each state's flower displayed atop its state.

## Conclusion

In fifty "short" years, Goldman has experimented with figuration/abstraction, symbolism/realism, landscapes/portraits, political art/formalism, etc. Hardly "light reading" befitting our Internet-era attention spans, it takes a lot of energy to grasp what Goldman's paintings do and why they matter not only to painters keen to learn new depiction techniques, but to everybody else who desperately needs image-dissecting tools to discover what lies beyond the scene. Bombarded daily with images that are hoaxes, forgeries, and deep fakes, it will only get worse I'm afraid. For now, it's easy, since there's no reason to believe anything that you see or read online. I imagine, however, that one day those online scenarios (the "metaverse") will intersect our daily lives in the form of VR, holograms, and bots, further distorting reality. We too must cultivate our "x-ray vision."

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Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp*, 1632, Oil on Canvas, 5'7" x 7'1"  
Mauritshuis, Den Haag, NL

## Bio

Associate Editor of *Aesthetic Investigations* since 2014, Sue Spaid teaches philosophy at Northern Kentucky University and the University of Dayton. She recently published *The Philosophy of Curatorial Practice: Between Work and World* (2020), which reflects over thirty-five-years of experience as a curator, critic, gallerist, and

museum director. The author of five books on art and ecology, Spaid's recently published philosophical papers address wellbeing and values in relationship to habitat, plant intelligence, climate justice, stinky foods' superpowers, hydrological justice, degraded land, biodiversity and urban farming. In addition to regularly presenting papers at aesthetics conferences, she has contributed chapters to *The State of Art Criticism* (2008), *The Philosophy of Arthur Danto* (2013), *Arte y Filosofía en Arthur Danto* (2016), *Advancements in the Philosophy of Design* (2017), *A Companion to Arthur Danto* (2021) and published in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, *Rivista di Estetica*, *Journal of Somaesthetics*, *Enrahonar: An International Journal of Theoretical and Practical Reason*, *Popular Inquiry*, *Art Inquiry: Recherche sur les art*, and *Philosophica*. Moving beyond aesthetics and environmental ethics, Spaid is increasingly publishing Cyberethics papers on such topics as hate speech and the philosophical ramifications of ChatGPT-3.

*Italian:* English

## ***Una conversazione con Dr. Kristi Nelson: A conversation with Dr. Kristi Nelson***

Joe Girandola(JG): Kristi Nelson (KN)

Through 40 years of marriage and life, Dr. Kristi Nelson has been a beacon of light in Stewart Goldman's repertoire of artwork. Her knowledge and expertise as an Art Historian, Professor/Mentor, and lifelong learner/educator/administrator at the University of Cincinnati enable insight in context with this overview of Stewart's life and work. Stewart's mentorship of hundreds of students at the Art Academy of Cincinnati over more than 30 years as Professor of Painting, this exhibition also serves as a tribute to their relationship in the city of Cincinnati. I thought it would be effective to enable some of Dr. Nelson's love of Italian Art History to guide this conversation.

### ***I. Perenne: Everlasting***

*JG: The life and work of Stewart Goldman begins with specific mark making technique that serves as evidence of a history of seeing and observation. Since you first met Stewart, can you describe how history and memory have shaped both of your desires to travel and understand the past while living in the present?*

*KN: Stewart has always been a student of art history, and thus we have so much in common that we can share with each other. His study of other artists (especially painters, but not limited to them), I believe, has informed so much of his work. He really tries to learn from other artists about form, space, color, movement, light, etc. It is further, I think, his way of having a conversation with those artists, as well as figuring out his place in that history – both past and present. Thus, we have always loved travelling, visiting museums, seeing new places, returning to familiar ones. We especially like visiting works in their original location such as*